

In the Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A system for accessing a surgical target site, comprising ~~the steps of:~~
an initial distraction system for distracting tissue in between an incision point and a surgical target site to create ~~creating~~ an initial distraction corridor; and
an assembly capable of distracting said tissue from said initial distraction corridor to a secondary distraction corridor and thereafter sequentially receiving a plurality of retractor blades for retracting said tissue from said secondary distraction corridor to thereby create an operative corridor to said surgical target site.

2. (Currently Amended) A [[The]] system of claim 1, for accessing a surgical target site, comprising:
an initial distraction system for creating an initial distraction corridor, wherein said initial distraction assembly includes a K-wire and at least one dilator capable of being slideably passed over said K-wire to perform said initial distraction; and
an assembly capable of distracting from said initial distraction corridor to a secondary distraction corridor and thereafter sequentially receiving a plurality of retractor blades for retracting from said secondary distraction corridor to thereby create an operative corridor to said surgical target site.

3. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein said assembly is capable of moving at least two speculum blades generally away from one another to create said secondary distraction corridor.

4. (Original) The system of claim 3, wherein said speculum blades are slideably coupled to said assembly.

5. (Currently Amended) A [[The]] system of claim 1, for accessing a surgical target site, comprising:
an initial distraction system for creating an initial distraction corridor, wherein said initial distraction assembly includes a K-wire and at least one dilator capable of being slideably passed over said K-wire to perform said initial distraction; and

an assembly capable of distracting from said initial distraction corridor to a secondary distraction corridor and thereafter sequentially receiving a plurality of retractor blades for retracting from said secondary distraction corridor to thereby create an operative corridor to said surgical target site;

wherein at least one of said initial distraction system and one of said retractor blades includes at least one stimulation electrode.

6. (Original) The system of claim 5, further comprising a control unit capable of electrically stimulating said at least one stimulation electrode, sensing a response of a nerve depolarized by said stimulation, determining a direction from at least one of said initial distraction system and one of said retractor blades to the nerve based upon the sensed response, and communicating said direction to a user.

7. (Original) The system of claim 6, further comprising an electrode configured to sense a neuromuscular response of a muscle coupled to said depolarized nerve, the electrode being operable to send the response to the control unit.

8. (Original) The system of claim 2, wherein said K-wire has a first stimulation electrode at a distal tip of the K-wire.

9. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein said system for establishing an operative corridor to a surgical target site is configured to access a spinal target site.

10. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein said system for establishing an operative corridor to a surgical target site is configured to establish said operative corridor via a lateral, trans-psoas approach.

11. (Original) The system of claim 6, further comprising a handle coupled to at least one of said initial distraction assembly and one of said retractor blades, the handle having at least one button

for initiating the electrical stimulation from said control unit to said at least one stimulation electrode.

12. (Original) The system of claim 6, wherein the control unit comprises a display operable to display an electromyographic (EMG) response of the muscle.

13. (Original) The system of claim 6, wherein the control unit comprises a touch-screen display operable to receive commands from a user.

14. (Original) The system of claim 6, wherein the stimulation electrodes are positioned near a distal end of at least one of the initial distraction system and one of said retractor blades.

15. (Currently Amended) A method of accessing a surgical target site, comprising the steps of:

creating an initial distraction corridor through tissue extending between an incision point and a [[to the]] surgical target site;

distracting said tissue from said initial distraction corridor to a secondary distraction corridor; and

sequentially introducing a plurality of retractor blades for retracting said tissue from said secondary distraction corridor to create an operative corridor to said surgical target site.

16. (Currently Amended) A [[The]] method of ~~claim 15~~, accessing a surgical target site, comprising the steps of:

creating an initial distraction corridor to the surgical target site ~~wherein said step of creating an initial distraction corridor is accomplished~~ by using a K-wire and at least one dilator capable of being slideably passed over said K-wire;

distracting from said initial distraction corridor to a secondary distraction corridor; and
sequentially introducing a plurality of retractor blades for retracting from said secondary distraction corridor to create an operative corridor to said surgical target site.

17. (Original) The method of claim 15, wherein said step of distracting from said initial distraction corridor includes performing a secondary distraction system.

18. (Original) The method of claim 17, wherein said step of performing secondary distraction system is accomplished by moving at least two speculum blades generally apart from one another.

19. (Original) The method of claim 15, further comprising the step of providing a control unit capable of electrically stimulating said at least one stimulation electrode, sensing a response of a nerve depolarized by said stimulation, determining a direction from a surgical accessory to the nerve based upon the sensed response, and communicating said direction to a user.